

## Grow-the-Growers Program Partner Management Team Bios



### Agri-Cultura Network (ACN)

*Executive Director of Agri-Cultura Network and La Cosecha CSA, Helga Garcia-Garza*

Helga Garcia-Garza has a vision for equity and food justice for underserved Hispanic and Native communities in her Central New Mexico region. Helga's lived experience as a member of a marginalized Native and Indigenous community, more than two decades of experience with cooperative organic farming, and her long history as a community organizer and environmental justice activist all inform her work as Executive Director of Agri-cultura Network and La Cosecha CSA. She has worked at ACN member farms, worked on tracking, quality control, and distribution of the network's produce. For the last 30 years she has been dedicated to community health initiatives on both sides of the US/Mexico region organizing and educating communities on Right to Know Right to Act regarding water, land and air contamination. She bases her work in a from-the-ground-up approach to building an environmental economy, as she believes the nutritional needs of her community are best served by local farmers who grow healthy, culturally appropriate food using organic and sustainable practices. Helga is the New Mexico Food & Ag Policy Council Chair, Castanea Fellow 2020-2021 and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Culture of Health Leader Fellow 2018-2021.

"As a Native woman in agriculture I am guided by our ancestral calendar, and I share this knowledge through an intergenerational process. As a farmer myself, I know first-hand the challenges of farm to market. I have experience and lessons learned through development of farm cooperatives in Brownsville, Texas and in Central Mexico. This inspired my strong commitment to protecting the environment and to building a healthy, sustainable, local economy through agricultural practices."



*Lead Trainer, Jack West*

Jack West, Grow the Growers' Lead Trainer and Program Coordinator, is from Albuquerque where he owns and operates Peas and Hominy Farm in the South Valley of Albuquerque. His farm specializes in onion and sweet potato production along with horticulture education. His horticultural knowledge is based on hands-on experience on small-scale intensive vegetable production farms for 16 years.

It was in southern France where Farming found Jack in the form of volunteer work for room and board. From there his passion grew as he became exposed to the beautiful and nourishing lifestyle that often accompanies a life connected to the soil.

He worked as an intern/laborer on farms in New Mexico, Northern California, Oregon, and Pennsylvania, he managed the farm at the Fulton Center for Sustainable Living in Chambersburg, PA, The Piedmont BioFarm in Pittsboro, NC, and Amyo Farms in Bosque Farms, NM. He started his own farm (Peas and Hominy) in 2013 and he has been teaching and instructing with Grow the Growers for 3 years.

His passions include procuring and processing the highest and best quality/nutrient dense/happy foods that are completely free from exploitation in the area to provide for his family and community. He also enjoys exploring and experiencing the beauty of the world with his loving family.

*Assistant Trainer, Bitsy Dodd*

In the summer of 2018, in the midst of a lifetime of exploring different fields of interest, Bitsy found herself working on a vegetable farm just West of the Rio Grande, in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Noting for years that farming vegetables was the best job she had worked yet, in 2022 Bitsy joined forces with Grow The Growers, phasing from one great growing opportunity to another, taking on the position as Assistant Trainer, under Jack West.

Reminding us there are wonders to be found through hard work, and direct exposure to nature and its elements, Bitsy is greatly looking forward to another sunny season of farming food in The South Valley.



*Site Manager, Reuben Preut*

Reuben is a native New Mexican and was raised in Corrales on an Asparagus farm. After years of learning multiple occupations and growing as a hobby he found himself called to the land in the South Valley. Having graduated from the Grow the Growers program and working with other farmers around the state he has been owner and operator of Zone Zero Farms in the south valley for 5 years, allied with the Agri-Cultura Network. Zone Zero Farms is currently focused on Garlic production in the South Valley, primarily Murado de Atrisco, to celebrate a long tradition of garlic growing in the Valle de Atrisco.

### Bernalillo County Open Space (BCOS)

*Open Space Supervisor, Mari Simbana*

Mari Simbaña, Bernalillo holds a Master's degree from the University of New Mexico in Community & Regional Planning and holds a Bachelor's degree in International Relations from Mount Holyoke College. Ms. Simbaña has over 20 years of municipal government and non-profit experience in land use and community planning, including short and long term planning in residential and commercial land use, Open Space, and local food system projects. Her background encompasses program management and planning facilitation, liaising between government and non-profit organizations, and presenting to

elected officials and community groups. She is working to further the County's Open Space vision to manage public lands and expand outreach and education, thus promoting community engagement in planning and resource building to instill community stewardship of natural, cultural, and historic resources.



*Open Space Coordinator, Adam Splitek*

Originally from San Antonio, Texas, Adam has called New Mexico home since 2014. His role as Open Space Coordinator includes planning and facilitating hands-on projects with youth/conservation corps partners as well as handling a variety of logistical needs related to our open space properties (access, security, maintenance issues, etc.). Prior to joining Bernalillo County, he spent 5.5 years in Taos with Rocky Mountain Youth Corps managing forest restoration, trail construction and other outdoor projects for youth and young adults throughout the upper Rio Grande region. Adam also spent 3 seasons doing field-based conservation work in the backcountry of Colorado and Wyoming as well as 5 years in Ecuador, first as a coordinator for volunteer and service-learning programs and later as an English teacher and photographer. While not at work, he can be seen riding his bike around town with an ever-growing collection of high-visibility accessories.

*Open Space Resource Technician, Kateri Sava*

Kateri Sava is a daughter, sister, and grower. She serves Bernalillo County as a Resource Technician in the Open Space Department supporting agricultural programming including Grow-the-Growers, Backyard Farming and more. Previously, she served as a school garden coordinator supporting a network of over 90 school gardens in Albuquerque Public Schools. With a special love for seeds and intergenerational learning - she works with high school students and local farmers to co-create agricultural internship opportunities Rio Grande High School Agricultural Internship Program. She also organizes with the Growing Health & Justice Coalition to foster youth leadership and institutional support for our local food system.



## Ciudad Soil and Water Conservation District (CSWCD)

### *GtG Partner and CSWCD Program Coordinator, Sean Ludden*

Sean Ludden is Programs Coordinator with Ciudad Soil and Water Conservation District and works with interdisciplinary teams to enact on-the-ground conservation projects to better our soil, water, urban and rural forests, native plant communities and agricultural working lands. With over a decade of experience managing farms of all sizes and growing crops in the Middle Rio Grande Valley, Sean's expertise is happily shared in workshops, trainings, conferences and field tours. Lately, his newest role at Ciudad SWCD is lead project manager for restoration operations at Candelaria Nature Preserve which uses no-till and regenerative principles towards wildlife farming fields.

Sean is completing his last semester of Masters of Natural Resources Stewardship/Ecological Restoration and is continuing to pursue a graduate certificate in Carbon Management, both through Colorado State University's Warner College of Natural Resources.

Also, owner and grower for Nepantla Farms in the North Valley, he utilizes an evolving mix of regenerative practices, acequia irrigation and good old-fashioned work. He is also the proud father to an exuberant 7-year-old soil enthusiast, assistant weed puller and herb harvester.



## NMSU/ Bernalillo County Extension Office

### *Agriculture and Natural Resources Agent, John Garlich*

John Garlich, grew up on a family farm in Illinois and studied Horticulture and Ag Business at the University of Illinois as well as in the Netherlands and Germany. John moved to NM in 2010 to work

with the NMSU Bernalillo County Cooperative Extension Service. His focus is on local food, horticulture crops, and small farms. He currently serves as the county program director. On the side, he is an organist for local churches.

